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Steering (towards a post Apology Australia) without a Rudder

The idea for this special issue of *Outskirts* originated with Kevin Rudd's *Apology to Indigenous Peoples* after his election as Prime Minister in 2008. The climate was hopeful with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (and non-Indigenous women, too) breathing a sigh of relief that the disastrous effects of White Australia's government policies had at last been symbolically, publicly and officially acknowledged. There was also, though, skepticism about the 'real' change this Apology might have for Indigenous Australians. Many of us wondered if the Apology would make any difference at all in the 'real' world, where the gaps between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians is still so glaringly apparent in areas such as health, education, housing and employment (Fredericks, 2008: 3; Behrendt 2008). We imagined this special issue of *Outskirts* would provide a forum for feminists to explore the complexities around the Apology which on the one hand provided a welcome gesture, long overdue ... but also provided a kind of dare to the new government to put their money where their mouth was. The *Apology* beamed a spotlight on inequities with its implicit promise to move 'forward with confidence to the future'.

By including in his speech Nanna Nungala Fejo's personal story of having been stolen from her family in the early 1930s, Rudd seemed to be speaking, at least in part, directly to Indigenous women. As in the earlier *Bringing Them Home* report (1997), personal stories highlighted ways women were especially affected by policies that separated women from children and children from families. By 2010, however, Indigenous women were vocal in expressing their dismay that nothing much had changed. At the International Indigenous Women's conference in Darwin Indigenous representative Barbara Cummings said, 'There was this enormous big apology by the Labor Party and nothing has happened,' (Hall, 2010). Two years later and Rudd's apology seemed to have been little more than lip-service.

Now we're not so sure it mattered, anyway. It seems we didn't want Kevin Rudd as our leader. When we sent out the Call for Papers for this issue we couldn't have imagined the rapid events that saw Rudd deposed in 2010, nor would we have anticipated the tense election that followed.

Indigenous rights were all but forgotten by both Julia Gillard (the new Prime Minister, Labour Party) and Tony Abbott (Liberal Party, and now Leader of the Opposition), in their election campaigns. This was not a campaign based on hope, but one that tapped instead into fears: of a flagging economy, of (imaginary) threats posed by new immigrants. This election was of concern to feminists in new ways, but Indigenous issues seemed largely invisible. Indeed Gillard, who had the thankless task of having to represent all women and prove herself as a worthy opponent to a shamelessly sexist opponent was now dubbed 'the post-hope Prime Minister' (Barry 2010) as though the Apology was old news. Further,

Gillard was repeatedly asked, during the election, to 'apologise' to Kevin Rudd for 'knifing him in the back' (Maynard & Chalmers 2010). When it comes to Gillard, discourses of 'apology' acquire an added layer of complexity. So now we have our first female Prime minister. And yet ... nothing much changes for Indigenous women.

Here, nevertheless, is the post-Apology Issue of outskirts. Bronwyn Fredericks examines the history of the ALP, and challenges our new Prime Minister to turn her focus on what her party is doing, post-Apology. In her paper on Australia's post-Apology landscape, Siobhan Marren gives an historical context to Kevin Rudd's Apology situating Gillard's post-apology Australia at the praxis between narrative and feminist ethics. Susanne Gannon explores the difficult space Gillard is forced to occupy in how she has been represented in popular magazines for girls. Mairead Shanahan, an undergraduate student, offers an essay of hope in her discussion of the Townsville Mums and Babies program.

With our call for papers we unintentionally gave our authors a difficult brief – to write about a post-Apology feminism at the very moment in which the context was changing. Julia Gillard's election gives us hope in some ways, but her election stalls the momentum of The Apology in others. How many 'posts' do we need before we see real change?

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